

Second Presbyterian Church  
Westminster Building  
521-23 Prince Street  
Alexandria  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-682

HABS  
VA  
7-ALEX,  
156-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
WESTMINSTER BUILDINGHABS  
VA  
7-ALEX,  
156-

Location: 521-523 Prince Street, Alexandria, Virginia  
(northeast corner of the intersection with St.  
Asaph Street)

Present Owner: Demolished after 1969 by the Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority as part of an urban renewal project in the old commercial center of Alexandria.

Statement of Significance: This eclectic early-twentieth century building housed community activities sponsored by the Second Presbyterian church.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The cornerstone-laying ceremony was held on October 9, 1912 and the building was formally opened March 25, 1913.

The Alexandria Gazette of October 10, 1912, carried the following story:

The corner stone of the Presbyterian Building of the Second Presbyterian Church was laid at 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon in the presence of a large congregation. Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22, A. F. and A. M., conducted the exercises. E. H. Kemper, worshipful master, and son of a former elder, presided. The historic Washington trowel and lesser lights were used on the occasion, and it was an inspiring event.

The stone was donated by Mr. William Chauncey of this city.

The pastor, Rev. Dr. John Allison, delivered an address. He said in part: 'This is an occasion of singular and unique interest. It marks an epoch in the history of this church. The spirits of the dead, who loved and labored in this historic city and church, seem to hover around this place and join in our songs of thanksgiving as we lay the cornerstone of a building to be devoted to the worship of God and to a ministry of human helpfulness. As

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this church nears its centennial milestone, its crowning glory is that it has constantly witnessed to the truth . . .

'As early as 1780 the Rev. Mr. Keith of New Jersey, under the direction of the synods of New York and Philadelphia, came to Alexandria with other brethren, and formed themselves into the Presbytery of Baltimore. Rev. Mr. Keith served as pastor until 1788, when he was called to Charleston, S. C. The Rev. James Muir became pastor in 1789. In the year 1817, 63 members withdrew, on account of the matter of a co-pastor, and formed the Second Presbyterian Church. Samuel Carson was chairman and Thomas Vowell clerk. This action was taken on June 9th, 1817. It was soon placed under the care of Winchester Presbytery. This Second Church grew in members and usefulness, having enrolled in its membership many prominent citizens of the city. Rev. Mr. Walton was pastor from 1827 to 1832. He was succeeded in regular order by Revs. Granger, Hutchinson, Jones, Graff, Hill, Danforth, Newlin, Thompson, Leftwich, Bulloch, Dinwiddie, Vance, Rice, Thacker, Brooke, Sevier, and the present pastor.'

'During Dr. Vance's pastorate the members of the old First Church on Fairfax Street, unified with the present congregation on St. Asaph and Prince Street.'

'The church was also re-modelled and now we again begin the work of erecting a new building to the glory of God . . .'

The choir rendered a fine musical program.

The cornerstone was placed in position and the usual metallic box was inserted therein, which contains current coins, religious papers, copy of by-laws of Alexandria-Washington Lodge, together with copies of the two daily newspapers of Alexandria . . .

This building, when completed, will contain basement, first floor, and second floor. The basement will be used for athletic purposes, while the first floor will be devoted to Sunday School use, and on the second floor will be located a large assembly hall.

We may add that early Alexandria newspapers show that the first pastor of this church was the Reverend Wells Andrews.

The formal opening of Westminster Hall was announced in the Alexandria Gazette of March 24, 1913:

Commencing tomorrow night and lasting for three nights, the formal opening of the new Westminster Hall, the handsome building which has just been erected by the Second Presbyterian Church, will take place. The new building stands on the corner of Prince and St. Asaph Streets, opposite the church building. It is two stories and basement in height and contains the Sunday school and rooms for the young people connected with the various societies of the church. In the basement there is a fine gymnasium. The building is constructed of brick with stone trimmings. It is of handsome design and one of the most attractive buildings devoted to religious work in the city. Its cost is about \$30,000. Joseph F. Rodgers was the contractor . . .

The building committee which was in charge of the erection of the new office is as follows: A. G. Uhler, Chairman; W. A. Moore, W. E. Lathrop, George B. Kennedy, W. H. Melchior, D. R. Stansbury, secretary and Alfred Thomson, treasurer . . .

2. Architect: Unknown
3. Builder, contractor, supplier: Joseph F. Rodgers is listed as the contractor.

B. Sources of Information:

Newspapers as cited.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

This two-storied building holds a commanding corner position and extends nearly half the block of St. Asaph Street northward toward King Street. Its exuberant contrast of light stone and brick and its use of eclectic detailing makes it an unusual edifice for Alexandria.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories, that present the effect of three pavilions, three bays along Prince Street and eleven bays along St. Asaph Street.
2. Wall construction, finish and color: Brick with limestone trim.

3. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: A raised double stairway parallel to Prince Street leads to the entrance and is traced with an iron railing. The building stands on a raised basement.
4. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance faces Prince Street and is crowned by a heavy pediment supported by large brackets.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Small flattened windows announce the basement and are trimmed with stone lintels and sills. Rectangular windows form the line of the first floor and are emphasized by stone keys, corners, and sills. In the middle of the building facing St. Asaph Street, a one-story bay containing two windows juts out slightly and its cornice echoes that above the doorway. Windows with semi-circular heads mark the second floor, with the large windows flanked by smaller windows denoting each second-floor pavilion unit. Again, the key, spring line, and sills are emphasized by light-colored limestone.
5. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Essentially flat with parapets (facade parapet with raked blocking, side elevations with mansard sections between pavilions).
  - b. Cornice, eaves: The roofline is flat and underlined by heavy paired brackets supporting a protruding cornice. The cornice is broken on the west by slanting (or mansard) skylights. Above the cornice is a brick parapet.

C. Description of Interior:

Center-hall plan with secondary rear entrance.

D. Site:

The main entrance to the building faces south, with the St. Asaph Street side facing west. The building is set back slightly from Prince Street. Its height and dominant silhouette make it a radical departure from the overwhelming residential character of Prince Street. But, because of its close proximity to Washington Street (one block to the west), it may be responding to the traffic generated by that major north-south thoroughfare.

Prepared by Mrs. Hugh B. Cox of  
The Historic Alexandria Foundation  
August 1968  
Edited by  
Antoinette J. Lee  
November 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken in 1968 to document the commercial and residential buildings of downtown Alexandria which were to be demolished in an urban renewal project. The project was cosponsored by the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Mrs. Hugh B. Cox was the historian and George Eisenman supplied the photographs. The material was edited and updated in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.